

Captive Hearts by gin_and_chronic

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Summary:

Beverly returns to Derry a month after the adult Losers defeat IT. While exploring the ruins of the house on Neibolt Street, she comes across the battered and broken form of Pennywise, hanging onto life by a thread.

She can't leave him there to recover, so she takes him home with her where she can keep an eye on him while she attempts to figure out how to kill him once and for all.

A relatively short fic - probably 6 or 7 chapters in total.

1. Chapter 1

She'd driven by the street almost daily since her return last week. Neibolt Street. Where it all began. Where it all ended.

Beverly Marsh had moved back to Derry, Maine nearly a month after the Losers had been reunited as adults, tasked with killing Pennywise - killing *IT* - once and for all. Her divorce from Tom Rogan finalized, and short-lived romance with Ben Hanscom now over, she was in the market for a fresh start, and for some strange reason Derry seemed the freshest location of all.

Derry was unexpected. Derry was symbolic. She was rolling up her sleeves and coming face-to-face with the demons of her past, but in a safer and more controlled environment now that the two 'Big Bad' figures - her father and her *other* childhood monster - were out of the picture.

A real estate listing had caught her eye immediately - a small but beautiful cabin on the outskirts of town, tucked into the woods overlooking the Penobscot River. Peaceful and bucolic. The type of place she could sip her coffee alone in the morning from her rocking chair on the cedar deck, watching the eagles swoop down to grab fish from the water. It was the type of place built for solitude, and Beverly figured she needed to be alone for a while.

That plan came crashing down as she made the brave and unwise decision to turn down Neibolt Street on Thursday afternoon, the one month anniversary of their final battle. The street sign couldn't keep haunting her anymore. She needed to prove to herself that she could handle seeing a certain lot where a certain house used to stand once again.

The luxury coupe struggled to navigate the minefield of potholes as she drove the four blocks to the well house... or what was left of it, anyway. It had almost completely collapsed following their battle, leaving only piles of half-rotten wood behind above ground. Below ground, she could still see a staircase leading to the basement, almost entirely filled in by rubble.

Later she would reflect on her actions, wondering what could have possibly possessed her to walk down those stairs. As far as she could tell, it was an incredibly dangerous thing to do. Rusty nails stuck out from the mostly broken stair treads as she cautiously made her way downstairs, but she couldn't turn back now. She came to face her fears, and she was going to do exactly that. Granted, she didn't realize that tetanus would be a fear that factored into today's adventure.

Only stumbling a few times on the way, she arrived in the basement. In the corner to her right, she recognized the stone walls of the well, obscured by fallen sheetrock and collapsed soil. But it was something in the corner to her left that caught her eye. Amidst the sea of hard, angular materials rested something soft and flowy. Fabric of some sort.

She approached the large mass curiously, leaning down to get a closer look, flinching when it moved suddenly. It was so covered in dirt that she wasn't sure exactly what it used to be - perhaps a bedspread or a curtain - but the movement suggested that animals might be using it as a home. Mice, probably, although a nagging voice in the back of her mind said that it might be raccoons and that they might have rabies. Still, she continued her approach.

She reached out to lift the fabric, hoping to see what might be living beneath. It barely budged, however. Strange, she thought, but perhaps it was trapped beneath the rubble. She gave it a firmer tug, causing the entire mass to roll over toward her.

Beverly wanted to scream at the sight in front of her, but no sound would come. Her mouth dropped open in a silent cry of horror at the emaciated, filthy clown on the floor beside her. While clearly *near* death, IT was not in fact dead. Not yet, anyway.

Its chest rose and fell in shallow, raspy breaths, and its eyelids fluttered a bit as if attempting to hold themselves open but immediately collapsing under their own weight. A soft, pained groan bubbled out of its throat - a sound that would have inspired pity in Beverly Marsh if it originated from any other creature. IT... the creature that had always seemed absolutely terrifying and possessed a presence that was truly larger-than-life... was downright pathetic in

this moment.

And yet, despite the pitiful state the creature was in, Beverly was infuriated by the mere fact that it was still alive. She sat down, cross-legged, simply staring at the clown's battered and broken form, attempting to figure out what her next steps would be.

Clearly they hadn't killed the monster, and they'd certainly given it one hell of an attempt, so she wasn't exactly feeling great about her ability to kill it on her own... even given its current position. Still, she couldn't just leave it here. What if it gained strength and unleashed its terror on the town of Derry once again? Beverly couldn't be responsible for leaving it free to go on another killing spree.

She sighed heavily and looked toward the sky, silently cursing any forces that might be up there for leaving her with only one logical solution - take the creature with her. Take it home, where she could keep it locked up until she figured out how to kill it for real.

Standing up and making a futile attempt to dust off the dirt from her pants, she gave the feeble body a once-over before deciding that it clearly wasn't going anywhere on its own anytime soon. Clearing a path for later, she made her way back up the stairs and to her car, mentally listing off all the tools she needed for her return.

Chains, certainly. Strong ones. And padlocks. Strong ones.

She also needed something to help her get it up the stairs. A furniture dolly or something. Perhaps one of those fancy ones with e-assist, specifically designed for stairs. They were probably pretty expensive, but Beverly could afford it and this was one scenario in which she really shouldn't cheap out.

Once she got the body on the dolly, she'd need ratchet straps to keep it there. And once she got the body up the stairs... fuck. Where was she going to put it? She doubted that it would fit in her 2-door coupe, even if the dolly weren't in the picture. The only logical solution was to rent a U-Haul truck for the day. Might as well do that first, she figured, so she had a place to put all of her tools.

Leaving her car behind in the U-Haul lot, she climbed into the small truck she'd managed to acquire in under 15 minutes - a 10 footer with a random state mural on the side. This one was for Kentucky, and it showed a painting of an insect overlooking a large cavern. Upon seeing it, she had released an audible, mirthless laugh at the bitter irony. The rental agent had remarked that folks often find the murals silly, clueless to the fact that Beverly was laughing for an entirely different reason.

Next stop: the hardware store. Beverly cautiously drove her truck down the road to the local big-box home improvement store, a fixture that had made its way onto the Derry scene during its relatively enormous boom a few years back. During that time, folks had seemingly decided that Derry was a pretty good place to live - after all, the crime sprees that haunted Derry for much of its history had completely disappeared for over 20 years. The population of the city had nearly doubled over the past decade, and along with people came stores like Target and Home Depot.

So Home Depot it was. Beverly cautiously drove her clunky vehicle down the road and toward the store she hoped would have everything she needed. Over the course of the next hour, she filled her cart with thick chains, the strongest padlocks she could find, ratchet straps, bolts with which she could affix her wrought iron guest bed to the floorboards, and an impulse grab for good measure - a pickaxe.

The only thing left on the list was the dolly, which she could not locate for the life of her. Flagging down a college-aged employee, who looked at the items in her cart with intrigue, she located the item in question and begrudgingly paid the requisite \$2200 on top of the cost of the other items she'd acquired.

"Are you sure you don't just want this non-electric one?" he had asked her. "It's only \$300."

Beverly was sure. Though its body was emaciated, the clown was still nearly 7 feet tall, and she was certain she'd kill herself in the process of attempting to get its body up the rickety staircase. She wasn't about to give the monster that gift.

The battery on the dolly needed to be charged for a couple of hours, and Beverly needed to make sure her space was adequately prepared to house - or rather *imprison* - a monster. She headed back to her cabin, where unpacked and plugged in the dolly before getting to work bolting her guest bed to the floor and appointing it with chains at its four corners - one for each leg, as well as one in the center of the headboard which would wrap around the thing's neck.

By the time she finished, the dolly was fully charged and the sun had fully set. Grabbing a headlamp and the shotgun she'd purchased after leaving Tom, she set out for Neibolt Street once again.

She arrived to find the clown in the same spot she had left it, still letting out desperate little coughs and wheezes here and there. Laying the dolly flat, she tugged the dirty body over and placed it on top, securing it down with ratchet straps before pressing the button that would lift the clown to an upright position, towering over her again in a far less intimidating state than ever before. She smirked a bit at seeing the creature like this - strapped to a dolly like Hannibal Lecter in 'Silence of the Lambs', seemingly minutes from death.

She carted the clown up the busted staircase, thankful that she'd shelled out the money for the e-assist dolly, laid it down flat in the back of her U-Haul truck, and set off toward her home again. Once they arrived, she brought the body inside where she stripped it of its dirty costume and this time looked toward the sky in gratitude upon discovering that it was wearing some form of undergarment.

She dressed the body in a pair of Tom's old sweatpants she'd stolen, which ended up being comically short on Pennywise, as well as an old long-sleeved men's t-shirt she wore while painting and doing other home improvement projects. While she originally feared the shirt might be too small, it ended up fitting quite loosely over his emaciated frame.

With the dolly's help, she transferred the clown to the bed, where she proceeded to chain the creature down and lock it up with nine massive padlocks - two per limb, and one for the neck. Curling up in a large, comfy chair in the corner of the room, she fell asleep clutching her shotgun.

When the morning light cascaded across Pennywise's face, the clown gasped and wheezed, startling Beverly awake. Shakily pointing the shotgun at his head, she slowly approached the bedside. The clown blinked rapidly, eyes darting all over the room but focusing on nothing. The creature began to cough uncontrollably.

Grabbing a water bottle from a basket on the nightstand, Beverly quickly unscrewed the cap and brought it to the clown's red lips. The creature drank what it could, though most dribbled down its chin and onto the stained shirt Beverly had provided. It looked up after a moment, staring toward the window in an attempt to understand its new surroundings. Beverly was surprised to find that its eyes had remained heterochromatic - the same as she had last seen them. While one was the bright gold color she remembered from childhood, the other was a deep turquoise blue.

They met hers. Recognition flashed in them, followed quickly by panic and fear. The clown opened its mouth in a gasp of horror and Beverly's hand darted back down to the shotgun. This was it. This was the confrontation. But before the creature could say or do anything to Beverly, it collapsed back down onto the bed, eyes rolling shut again.

It slept peacefully until late afternoon, when Beverly heard the telltale sound of chains frantically rattling from the guest room. Quickly grabbing the shotgun and rushing upstairs, she threw open the door and shakily pointed the barrel at the clown's head. Hearing the creak of the door hinges, the creature's head swiftly turned toward Beverly, spotting her and the gun. It began to panic more, hyperventilating and struggling harder against its restraints, terror evident on its cartoonish features.

Feeling a sudden and inexplicable rush of pity for the creature, and coming to the quick realization that a scared animal is a dangerous animal, Beverly lowered the gun and cautiously moved toward Pennywise. Placing the gun on the foot of the bed, she approached his bedside with her hands held up in front of her, a stream of calming noises leaving her mouth.

The fear on the creature's face intensified as she grew closer, and its eyes frantically darted between her face, her hands, the gun, and the

restraints. They locked on her own eyes once she was close enough that Pennywise could feel the heat rolling off her skin. In a desperate attempt to defend itself, the creature snarled angrily as it attempted to lunge its head forward to bite whatever part of Beverly happened to be reachable. The chain around its neck halted its movement, however, choking the clown until it coughed and wheezed once again.

Its sudden movement had made Beverly flinch and temporarily freeze, but she continued moving closer. Its eyes watched her in sheer horror as one hand came up to... pet it?

Her fingers stroked the creature's scalp and flowed through its fluffy orange hair as she whispered a gentle chorus of "Shhh... it's okay. You're okay."

Looking back down at the clown's face again, she found that the look of horror had shifted into a look of wide-eyed, innocent worry. It reminded her of a time she'd found a lost child in a shopping mall a few years back, and her heart panged again despite her best efforts to remind herself of exactly what it was that she had brought into her home. Her eyes locked onto the clown's, and it opened its mouth cautiously. Lower lip quivering, it managed a pathetic whimper - a desperate, pleading "Bev..."

Continuing to rake her fingers through its hair, mentally noting how incredible it felt between her fingers, she gently shushed the creature again in an attempt to reassure it that she wasn't here to kill - at least not right now.

Finally calmed, or perhaps just too exhausted to remain awake, Pennywise fell back asleep.

2. Chapter 2

Pennywise awoke the next morning to the smell of coffee. Not yet registering where he was, he looked around the room in confusion before spotting the beautiful redhead in the corner, curled up in a chair and reading a battered paperback while sipping a steaming mug of the delicious smelling liquid. It suddenly came rushing back to him - everything that had seemed like a strange dream yesterday.

On the floor beside her chair, he spotted something shiny. The shotgun. Perfectly still, he silently analyzed her in wide-eyed worry. She froze after a moment, feeling as though she was being watched. Looking up from her book, she met his terrified eyes. Her hand shot down to the gun, not yet picking it up to aim it at him, but simply resting there at the ready.

He opened his mouth to speak. It took a few tries for the words to make their way out, but he eventually managed to muster up enough energy to rasp out "Where am I?"

His voice didn't sound anything like Beverly remembered. It wasn't high-pitched, eerie, or inhuman any longer. It sounded like a perfectly normal, if weak and atrophied, male voice.

Recovering from the surprise of realizing that the strange voice she'd come to associate with the clown was just for show, she responded honestly. "My house."

It was his turn to be surprised. How could he be in Chicago? He could never leave Derry before. Unless... did she really move back to her hometown? After all that had happened here?

"Why?" he asked, eyes still wide with worry.

"I wasn't going to leave you there." she told him tersely. "You don't deserve freedom."

He laughed at that - a bitter, harsh bark of laughter that quickly turned into a cough. "Freedom?!" he spat. "You have an interesting idea of freedom, Bev. But I guess that makes sense, with the choices

you've made in life."

She just sat there and glared at him, refusing to give in and respond to his antagonistic words.

After a few moments, he spoke again. "Why haven't you tried to kill me?"

A brief flash of embarrassment showed on her features before she quickly corrected them back into a scowl. "I wanted you to be awake for what I do to you." she lied. "You don't deserve a quick death."

She watched a smug smile slowly grow on his red lips, distorting the lines on his cheeks in a familiar way. "You don't know how." he chuckled with as much strength as he could muster... which wasn't much. "You don't have any idea how to kill me, do you Bev?"

The slack-jawed, guilty look on her face gave away that this was the truth. He laughed again, and her jaw snapped shut in a tense scowl. Now furious, she shot up from her chair and stalked over to him. His smug look disappeared as she sneered down at him.

"That's okay." she hissed. "I don't need to know. Eventually you'll tell me yourself, because being here forever, chained to this bed? That will be such torture that you'll beg me to put you out of your misery."

He swallowed hard, eyes locked on hers. She was... probably *right*.

Beverly walked toward the doorway, pausing by the dresser to turn on a security camera pointed directly at the bed. She set it back down, took a deep breath, and turned to look over her shoulder at him.

"There's a straw by your head." she said quietly. "I wedged a water bottle between the mattress and headboard for you. In case you get thirsty. Just... call for me if you need a refill."

He looked down at the straw, then back to her in open-mouthed wonder. She gave a curt nod and left the room, closing the door behind her.

The bottle ran dry after a while - Pennywise really was parched. While he definitely wished for more water, he stubbornly held out on calling to ask for a refill, choosing instead to suffer in silence. Or so he thought. Unfortunately, his dry throat itched terribly, throwing him into a dramatic coughing fit that had Beverly rushing up the stairs and into the room with a pitcher.

Not worrying about getting too close given his current state, she rushed to the bedside without hesitation, pouring the water into his bottle and lifting the bottle from its position to place the straw up to his red lips. He glared at her, but instantly drank the water down, causing her to smirk at how stubborn and immature he was behaving. It was sort of childlike. And almost... cute.

When he'd had his fill, she topped the bottle off and wedged it between the mattress and headboard once again. Not wanting to leave him alone just yet if she was likely going to have to rush back in again, she walked over and sat down in the chair. Grabbing the book she had been reading that morning, she settled in and made herself comfortable.

After maybe 20 minutes of silence, the boredom and curiosity got to Pennywise.

"Where's the fat boy?" he rasped.

Beverly looked up from her book, confused, before it dawned on her that he was talking about Ben. "That... uhh... didn't work out." she said quietly.

"Big surprise." he said, rolling his eyes.

She slammed the book down on the arm of the chair. "Oh, of course, because *little Bevvie Marsh* can't keep a man, right?" She spat. "Too many daddy issues, right?"

He barked out a laugh of genuine amusement, eyes lighting up with joy for the first time since he awoke. "That's *not* what I meant, but if the shoe fits..." he said.

"What, then?!" she pressed, still fuming.

He looked out the window, contemplating whether to continue the discussion. Giving into the fact that he was bored out of his mind, he rolled his eyes and sighed before looking back to her. "It's almost like a crush from 30 years ago isn't the best basis for a relationship or something." he said in an oddly quiet, sincere tone.

Beverly blinked in surprise. He was spot on, actually. That was exactly the problem.

She let out a small chuckle of relief, and it was his time to blink in surprise. "Yeah, pretty much. Everything I did--" she stopped suddenly before mumbling under her breath, "Why am I telling *you* this?"

"Who else you gonna tell?" he said, looking around at the empty room. To be honest, he couldn't care less about their failed relationship, but he was bored enough to listen if she felt like talking. And he could at least bask in their suffering a bit, if she did.

She looked at him for a moment before quietly continuing. "Everything I did disappointed him. I wasn't the girl he thought I was. I was never going to satisfy his fantasies... the daydreams he'd been perfecting over the past 30 years."

Pennywise looked at her for a moment, face unreadable. In a suspiciously gentle tone, he finally said "He's an idiot."

She looked at him as though that was the most ridiculous thing she'd ever heard. "He's a world-renowned architect!" she spat, jumping to Ben's defense.

"Doesn't mean he's not an idiot." the clown responded with as much of a shrug as he could physically muster.

Beverly stared at him, brows furrowed in confusion. What possible motive could he have to take her side? Unless... was he trying to butter her up in hopes she'd set him free? The nerve!

"You're an idiot, too." he stated simply.

Okay, guess not, thought Bev. He's just being an asshole. She glared at him, but he could also see the curiosity on her face.

“You believed a man who hadn’t see in you in 27 years, and who barely knew you back then, when he told you he was in love with you after - what - *two days*? ” he elaborated. “You’re an idiot.”

As much as she hated to admit it, he had a point. And moreover, she found his brutal honesty kind of refreshing. They stared at one another for a while, her face wearing a look of astonishment and his wearing a look of obstinance, when a sudden noise broke through the silence.

His stomach. It was growling. Loudly.

“You know, Bev...” he began with a smug smile, looking down at his stomach and then back up to her. “You’re not going to get to keep me alive to torture me if the hunger kills me first.”

She laughed cruelly, causing his smile to falter. “Well, then...” she spat, standing up to approach his bedside and glare down at him once again. “I guess I’m going to just have to try to enjoy watching you starve to death. Because there’s no way in hell I’m going to bring you victims.”

His stomach growled again, and he flinched in pain before turning his head away from her with a look of embarrassment. Of all the people to see him in this weak condition, why did it have to be one of the Losers?

In a last-minute act of kindness, she wiped the glare off her face and proceeded to leave the room, giving him some peace. As her hand touched the doorknob, though, she heard a barely audible mumble from the bed.

“What?” she said in an annoyed tone of voice, spinning around to meet his eyes again.

Gritting his teeth through the pain, he willed himself to speak a little louder. “Meat.” he said, not meeting her eyes. “Raw meat. I can eat that.”

She stared at him for a moment, contemplating his request, before giving him a curt nod and walking out.

3. Chapter 3

The doorknob turned an hour or so later, snapping Pennywise out of the daydream he'd been having - one about escaping, of course. When the door swung open, he could see that Beverly was holding something that looked and smelled incredible - a raw steak cut into small pieces. His mouth began watering immediately, and he had to swallow repeatedly to clear his mouth enough to speak.

"Is that for me?" he asked, somewhat amazed by her generosity given the circumstances.

"No, I'm going to sit here and eat a raw steak in front of you." she replied sarcastically. The look of hurt on his face told her that he didn't understand that she was joking, so she added on a quiet "Yes, it's for you."

Grabbing a spoon from her back pocket, since she had decided a fork would be too risky, she walked over and placed the meal on the nightstand. She then proceeded to drag her chair over to his bedside, and it became clear to Pennywise that she intended to hand-feed him the meal. He scowled. This was absolutely humiliating. But the fact of the matter was that he was absolutely starving, and he'd take whatever he could get right now... though he'd definitely make it clear that the feeding method wasn't ideal.

She sat down and scooped a bit of meat onto the spoon. Noting his look of displeasure, she couldn't contain the urge to capitalize on his embarrassment. "Open up!" she said in an overly enthusiastic voice, as though she were speaking to a toddler.

He glared angrily, but did in fact open his mouth, bringing his head forward as much as possible to take the spoon into his mouth while maintaining direct eye contact. It was a bit much for Beverly, who was now regretting her antagonistic display. She looked away and cleared her throat, a heavy blush coloring her cheeks. The rest of the meal was delivered in silence, and she left for the evening without saying another word to him.

She returned again in the morning to find Pennywise already awake,

having smelled the coffee as soon as it began to brew. She walking over to the chair that still sat by his bedside, she sat down and simply stared at him silently. Not angrily, just... with interest. Noticing that his eyes kept darting toward the mug in her hand, she quirked a curious brow at him.

“Do you... want some?” she asked tentatively, voice almost a whisper.

His eyes shot up to hers, and she could see shame in them. He was still too humiliated to ask for anything he desired, so she'd have to offer things to him. Her offers also clearly embarrassed him, but at least he'd get what he needed that way.

Wondering why she was being so accommodating toward him the entire time, she adjusted the chains around his legs so that he could sit up. He understood immediately, scooting up to rest his back against the headboard. In a last-minute epiphany, Beverly quickly shot her hand behind the headboard to tighten the chain around his neck before he had a chance to come to the realization that the slack that his new position provided would allow him to dart his head forward and bite her.

Hands shaking so much that the coffee threatened to spill from the rim, she brought the mug up to his painted lips. He took a small sip while looking up at her, and Beverly came to the sudden realization that they had never been this close - at least not while he was awake. Up close, she could see his individual eyelashes and the subtle patterns in his irises. The gold eye had a thin red limbal ring, which made sense given that his eyes would shift to red when he was particularly enraged. The blue iris began as a light, powdery tone near the pupil, darkening to a deep turquoise near the outer rim.

Temporarily satisfied with the long sip he'd taken, Pennywise sat back against the headboard. Every few minutes, she held the mug up to his lips without making him ask. When it ran empty, she turned it over in her hand. In retrospect, she wasn't sure why she was surprised that there was no red lipstick on the white ceramic, given that there had never been any indication that he woke up and applied his makeup each morning. It was simply part of him. Part of this form, at least.

Reflecting back on the night she'd found him, she remembered that the skin on his torso was the same paper-white tone as the skin on his face, which she had always assumed to be greasepaint. Clearly it wasn't. Her eyes scanned the visible flesh on his body. Face? White. Neck? White. Hands and feet? ... Really dark, actually. Strange.

She looked up to find him staring at her with an arrogant smirk, clearly under the impression that she had been checking him out. She huffed audibly, removing herself from the chair, turning on the security camera, and leaving the room.

After a while, Pennywise heard the sound of a home security system being armed, and of a car starting. Beverly was going somewhere. He stared out the window, watching her car pull away and wondering when she'd return.

She didn't for several hours, and he found himself on the verge of crying from boredom throughout the day. As much as he despised her, she was the only thing keeping him entertained while he was stuck here. This truly was torture, and her words from before came rushing back to him. This was her intention, he realized. She was trying to torture him into a form of suicide.

There was one glaring problem with her little plan, though. That secret she was hoping he'd give up? The way to finish him off for good? *He didn't know it.*

His existence hadn't exactly come with a handbook. He honestly wasn't even sure if starving would end his life permanently. *He didn't know.*

She returned after nightfall, carrying a large canvas tote full of hardware supplies. Without saying a word she entered the guest room and, much to Pennywise's surprise, crawled under his bed. After a moment of confusion, it occurred to him that she was doing something to his chains. She was making some sort of adjustment.

Beneath the bed, she was hard at work reconfiguring the chains into an interconnected, loop-like system that would allow him to sit up and lie down at his leisure. If he sat up, the chains around his legs would automatically loosen as the chain around his neck

automatically tightened. Vice versa for laying down. If it ended up working the way she thought it was, it was a truly brilliant system.

Pennywise was simultaneously appreciative of the gesture and deeply ashamed of his position. Pulling herself out from under the bed, Beverly stood up, dusted off her clothes, and looked over to the clown on the bed. She could see the humiliation on his face. When he looked up at her, he could see the pity on hers. He broke eye contact immediately, looking out the window at the dark nothingness, and she left the room again.

His secret worries that she wouldn't return for many hours were assuaged when she reentered a few minutes later carrying another plate of steak. While he appreciated the food, he wasn't sure that this was any less torturous than being left alone. It was certainly more mortifying. He felt tears pricking at his eyes as she fed him, but he avoided eye contact, determined not to let her see.

About halfway through the plate, she accidentally dropped a piece of meat beside his far shoulder. Standing up, she leaned over his body to reach for it, feeling fairly confident in the lack of head movement the chains afforded him. As she hovered over him looking for the errant chunk of steak, he began to speak very softly.

"Bev... I don't *know* how." he told her in a whisper, voice cracking under the weight of his emotions.

She froze, turning her head to look at him, so close their noses were nearly touching. His eyes back and forth between her own, pain evident on his features.

"You think I haven't tried?" he continued, tears welling up in his large eyes. "I've been alive for billions of years. You think that hasn't gotten old?"

Beverly's mouth dropped open and brows furrowed in surprise and sympathy. Unable to handle the cruel irony of her pity, Pennywise screwed his eyes shut and turned his head away.

She took the hint, leaving the room so that he could have some time alone with his thoughts. After all, she needed some time alone with

hers, as well.

4. Chapter 4

“What do I call you?” she asked the next morning, sitting beside him and sharing her mug of coffee. “Pennywise or something else?”

He released a bitter scoff. “Does it matter?” he asked. What was the point of this conversation? Why did his captor ask him these kinds of questions?

“It does to me.” she said simply, her gentle tone in direct conflict with his bitter one.

He turned to glare at her, but softened almost instantly upon seeing the sincerity on her face. “Call me whatever you want.” he told her with a sad sigh. “I don’t have a name.”

“Alright.” she said after a long sip of coffee. “Pennywise works. But maybe I’ll shorten it to ‘Penn’ or something. Pennywise is a mouthful.”

A genuine smile threatened to erupt on his lips at the sheer silliness of being given a nickname by Beverly Marsh. He looked up to her and their eyes met in a strange, friendly sort of way, fully at odds with the reality of their situation.

He broke off the eye contact first, and she found herself oddly hurt by the action. A little voice in the back of her head, however, screamed that he was not her friend. That he was her prisoner. That she brought him here to kill him, and she couldn’t abandon her mission of figuring out *how*.

She wordlessly left the room, shortly thereafter leaving the house as well. Wondering how long she’d be gone this time, he stared out the window and surrendered to the boredom. There was a little bird in the tree outside, singing loudly. It was entertaining at first, but after about two and a half hours of the loud, repetitive trill, Pennywise was wishing for the ability to rip out his own eardrums.

He yelled at the bird to no avail. If anything, the volume of the clown’s voice caused the bird to compensate for the excess noise,

further raising its own volume. He settled on simply glaring at the offensive creature instead, and after about 30 minutes, something incredible happened... the window slammed shut.

There was no wind, and Beverly had not returned home to potentially create a wind tunnel from the front door to his guest window. Even if she had returned, that wouldn't make sense, given that the guest room door was closed. He had caused this. Even in his weakened state, he had retained at least some of his telekinetic powers. A devious smirk grew on his mouth as he looked at the window, then down to the chains around his wrist.

Though he felt confident in his assessment that he wasn't yet strong enough to escape his binds, perhaps he would be in another day or two. The steak, while obviously inferior to his preferred meat source, was helping.

Everything about this place was helping, as much as he hated to admit it. Clean water, clean air, fresh meat. Even coffee in the morning. Aside from the chains, the boredom, and the fact that the person keeping him here intended to kill him... it honestly wasn't horrible. It was better than the collapsed house on Neibolt Street, at least.

Beverly returned a couple hours later with a plate of food - this time a mix of steak and what appeared to be sashimi. Interesting, he thought, but he supposed sashimi did count as raw meat. She noticed him looking at the pretty pieces of fish with intrigue, and explained herself.

"I grabbed some sushi for lunch while I was out, and I thought you might be able to eat this." she said with a hesitant smile.

He shrugged, willing to give it a try. It sure looked appetizing.

With a pair of wooden chopsticks instead of her usual spoon, she brought a thinly-sliced piece of salmon up to his lips. He was instantly smitten, and Beverly chuckled softly at the way his face lit up in unadulterated joy.

She watched him silently as he ate, focusing so intently on the

emotions that crossed his features that her attention began to freak him out a bit. He stopped mid-chew to mumble out "What?"

"You're... really beautiful." she said, hand drifting upward as though she intended to touch his face, but falling back down again when she noticed her mistake.

Noting his look of absolute shock, she cleared her throat and continued in a deliberately clinical tone, as though she were simply stating that the sky is blue. "Sorry, it's my job to notice these things." she told him. "This form... it's quite striking. I never really noticed that before. Why did you make it so pretty?"

He scowled at her choice of adjective. *Pretty?* He was certain he'd never been described as such, and didn't really enjoy the sound of it now.

"I didn't create the look." he grumbled. "I took it."

"Oh..." she said quietly, looking down at the plate of food in an attempt to hide her embarrassment over the whole topic of conversation.

He watched her for a moment before quietly speaking again. "You're also really beautiful." he said earnestly. "But I *had* noticed that before."

Beverly's eyes shot back up, locking onto his intense, honest gaze. Neither knew how long they sat there staring into one another's eyes. It felt at once like a split second and an eternity. One thing was evident - there was something there. Both felt it. A strange, electric current between them. Completely foreign to Pennywise. Unfortunately quite familiar to Beverly, who instantly recognized it for what it was, but still found herself unable to look away.

She released an audible sigh of relief when an external force broke the spell for them - a herd of deer running through the woods beside the house.

"Call if you need anything." she whispered huskily, silently cursing her voice for sounding so sensual as she stood up and walked out of

the room for the night. He gave a shaky nod.

When she returned in the morning with coffee, he sat up to rest his back against the headboard, hissing sharply in pain.

“What is it?” she asked frantically, genuinely concerned for his well-being. Her reaction did not go unnoticed by him.

“The chain...” he said, trailing off.

Without a second thought, she came to sit on the side of the bed, shifting the chain away from his neck. It was the first time she’d touched his skin since the first night, when he was completely incapacitated, and she did it as though it was the most natural thing in the world.

Not even thinking of hurting her, he tilted his head out of the way to allow her better access. Clearly evident on his white skin was an angry looking sore caused by the metal rubbing harshly against his skin for several days.

“Fuck.” she whispered sheepishly, taking his hand in hers. “Sorry.”

His eyes locked onto hers, a silent understanding passing between them. He swallowed hard and his fingers twitched in hers, as though he desperately wanted them to intertwine but was consciously tamping down this instinct.

Ever-so-slightly, the clown began to move his head toward hers, stopping suddenly at another shooting pain. He gritted his teeth in pain, and she snapped out of it, rushing off toward the hall closet to grab a first aid kit. In it, she found a small tube of Neosporin, as well as some medical tape that she could wrap around the chain.

Returning to her spot on his bed, she began to apply the cream as gently as possible, giving him an apologetic wince when he hissed in pain. She froze immediately afterward, hand stilling on his neck. Her eyes moved down to look at her fingertips in poorly concealed shock, and she pressed on his neck more firmly.

Beneath her fingers she felt an undeniable flutter. A rhythmic pulse. A heartbeat.

Slowly turning her head to look at the window, then at the place on the wall where Pennywise's shadow would be given the location of the light source, she gasped. There it was. He'd never had one before.

The fingers on his neck detected a stronger, faster rhythm, and she looked down at his face, shrouded in confusion and worry.

"What?" he whispered, voice quivering with anxiety.

Her wide eyes locked onto his, and she opened her mouth to speak but no sound would come out.

"What, Bev?!" he asked again, more frantically this time. The pulse was growing faster and stronger by the second.

Finally able to speak, she asked the critical question in a harsh, raspy whisper - "Did you always have a pulse?"

He blinked rapidly in confusion, which swiftly turned to fear as he realized the implication of her words. His eyes widened further as a wave of dread washed through his body.

He had a pulse. He had a heart. Things with hearts were... *mortal*. Easy to kill.

"Bev..." he began desperately, voice trembling with fear. He didn't need to articulate the clear undertone of his words. It was painfully obvious that he was asking her - *begging* her - to take it easy. To refrain from doing anything rash. To have mercy.

Shooting up from the bed, she silently backed out of the room, face drained of blood.

The door closed, and he began to hyperventilate, frantically looking from one chained limb to the next. He needed to get out of there, and he needed to do it quickly.

Downstairs, Beverly paced back and forth in the kitchen, hand tightly pressed against her mouth. She had just learned that this supernatural creature - one that she had no idea how to kill ten minutes ago - was apparently not as supernatural as she thought. And his reaction to her discovery had basically confirmed that his pulse

was the key to killing him.

That's why she brought him here, right? To kill him? To kill *IT*?

Four days ago, she'd have done so without hesitation, but now? Now things were different, in ways she couldn't fully explain. Was she really a killer? Especially now that he seemed... more or less *human*?

Upstairs, Pennywise was having a mental breakdown of his own. As much as he tried to focus on unlocking the padlocks that kept him chained to the bed and at the mercy of the woman he'd almost forgotten was a core member of the Losers Club, and who maintained a personal vendetta against him, they wouldn't budge.

How had he closed the window? He didn't really try. Maybe that was the key. Maybe he was trying too hard right now. Maybe he needed to relax. The idea sounded laughable to him in his current panicked state, but it was worth a try.

He attempted to relax the muscles in his body, looking out the window and focusing on the gentle way the leaves on Beverly's stately oak tree swayed in the wind. After an hour or so, he felt his heartbeat - the one he didn't even realize existed when he woke up this morning - slow considerably. His breaths were coming more steadily now. He was as relaxed as he probably could be, given the circumstances.

The locks began to rattle gently as he visualized them coming undone. Slowly but surely, one popped open. One down, eight to go. He spent the entire afternoon focusing on unlocking each and every one, having to pause occasionally to calm himself down again. But eventually, as the sun began to set behind the oak, the last one popped free.

And the guest room door immediately opened.